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ABSTRACT

A survey of 242 graduates from 17 tribal colleges explored the effectiveness of tribal colleges. After a brief description of survey methodology, this report describes demographics and enrollment characteristics of the respondents, all of whom graduated in spring 1998, and compares them to similar data on tribal college students in general. Next, the report presents the current activities of tribal college graduates, including employment patterns, median salaries, and the percentage of students who continued their education at tribal and mainstream institutions. Results show that tribal college graduates tended to be nontraditional, female, American Indian, and first-generation recipients of associate's degrees and certificates, and they remained in the local community. Tribal college graduates seemed to be employed at higher rates than those who had not attended college. Most graduates reported having full- or part-time jobs despite the difficult circumstances in most reservation communities. Many graduates obtained jobs that served their local communities, thereby positively affecting the overall American Indian population. A substantial share of alumni used their tribal college experiences and credentials to transfer to mainstream institutions, indicating that tribal colleges have contributed to increasing levels of educational attainment for American Indians. The majority of respondents were satisfied with their overall college experience, major courses, class sizes, instruction, faculty, and administrators. However, graduates were less satisfied with laboratory and library facilities on campus, and few believed they received adequate career counseling and job placement services. (Contains 28 references.) (TD)

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Creating Role Models for Change
A Survey of Tribal College Graduates

Prepared by:
American Indian Higher Education Consortium
The Institute for Higher Education Policy
Sallie Mae Education Institute

A product of the Tribal College Research and Database Initiative,
a collaborative effort between the American Indian Higher Education Consortium
and the American Indian College Fund

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I. INTRODUCTION

The history of higher education for American Indians[1] in the United States largely has been one of systemic failure. For hundreds of years, the primary goal of postsecondary education efforts for American Indians at predominantly white, mainstream institutions was cultural assimilation rather than students' educational development and progress. This history leaves a legacy that reaches up to the turn of the millennium (Boyer, 1997; Cunningham and Parker, 1998). Even if they manage to enroll in higher education, American Indians—especially residents of isolated reservations—continue to face many barriers to participation and persistence, including inadequate academic preparation, financial difficulties, lack of role models, unfamiliar institutional environments, and the distance from family and community networks (Wright, 1992).

As a result, American Indians have the lowest level of educational attainment of any racial or ethnic group. In 1990, among American Indians 25 years and older, only 66 percent were high school graduates and just 9 percent had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Given the fact that almost 40 percent of the estimated 2.3 million total American Indian population was under the age of 20 in 1997, participation in education beyond high school is a priority. Furthermore, one out of five American Indians live on reservations, where access to postsecondary education continues to be limited (Census Bureau, 1998).[2]

Within this context, the 33 Tribal Colleges and Universities in the United States and Canada[3] were established over the past three decades to help increase American Indians' access to higher education. These colleges, which were founded as part of the American Indian self-determination movement that began in the 1960s, seek to provide affordable and culturally relevant postsecondary education, especially for geographically isolated reservation communities. The Tribal Colleges are unique institutions that combine personal attention and the integration of tribal values into curricula and institutional environments with traditional, Western-based coursework that is transferable to mainstream colleges. The cultural aspects of Tribal Colleges are especially important to the students they serve, given the historical legacy they are trying to overcome.

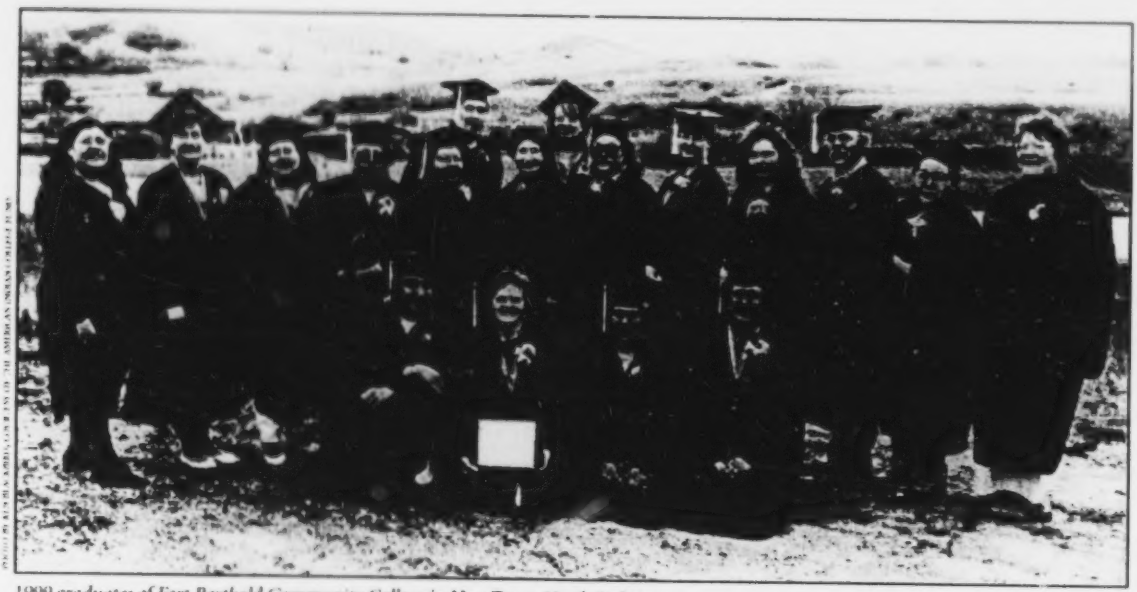
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN COLLEGE FUND.

Marie Arthur, a 1999 graduate of Little Big Horn College in Crow Agency, Montana.

[1] In this report, the term "American Indians" refers also to Alaskan Natives.

[2] In 1990, 21 percent of all American Indians lived on reservations or trust lands (Census Bureau, 1998).

[3] The 33rd Tribal College, Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College, became a member of AIHEC in October, 1999, and was not included in the analysis for this report. In addition, data generally were not available for Red Crow Community College because it is located in Canada.



1999 graduates of Fort Berthold Community College in New Town, North Dakota.

> *"If it weren't for Sinte Gleska I would still be ignorant of my Lakota culture. This is perhaps the strongest aspect of Tribal Colleges."*
> — graduate, Sinte Gleska University

Tribal Colleges are succeeding where mainstream colleges frequently have failed. Evidence of this success includes the fact that total enrollment at the colleges has increased quite rapidly as local demand expands and new Tribal Colleges continue to come into existence (see AIHEC and The Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999). In 1995-96, Tribal Colleges awarded 19 percent of all associate's degrees and 10 percent of all certificates awarded to American Indians (NCES, 1996a). Ultimately, however, the success of the Tribal Colleges will be measured by the success of their graduates. Have the Tribal Colleges prepared students for future employment and education? Are Tribal College alumni employed in meaningful jobs? Are graduates continuing on for more advanced degrees? Are graduates satisfied with the education they received at the Tribal Colleges?

To address these issues, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) commissioned a survey

Table One: Tribal Colleges Participating in the 1999 Alumni Survey

Bay Mills Community College
Blackfeet Community College
Cankdeska Cikana Community College
College of the Menominee Nation
Crownpoint Institute of Technology
Dull Knife Memorial College
Fort Peck Community College
Haskell Indian Nations University
Northwest Indian College
Salish Kootenai College
Si Tanka College
Sinte Gleska University
Sisseton Wahpeton Community College
Sitting Bull College
Stone Child College
Turtle Mountain Community College
United Tribes Technical College

NOTE: Si Tanka College recently changed its name from Cheyenne River Community College.

Survey Design and Report Methodology

Between May and July, 1999, the Tribal College Alumni Survey was mailed to 965 students who graduated from a Tribal College at some time during the spring of 1998.[4] The survey population was derived from lists of names and addresses of all graduates that were provided to AIHEC by 17 of the Tribal Colleges (see Table One).[5] Two follow-up surveys were mailed to non-respondents before analysis of the survey results began in the fall of 1999. Responses were received from 242 graduates, for an overall response rate of 27 percent.[6] Such a response rate was expected, given that a mail survey was used and that American Indian alumni living on reservations often are difficult to reach.[7] Unless noted otherwise, results are reported for those graduates who responded to a particular question (i.e., they exclude missing cases).

Several aspects of the survey design should be kept in mind when interpreting the results. In general, self-reported data such as those collected through mail-in surveys may be more suspect than other forms of data collection, since some respondents may be confused about certain questions, may fill out the survey form incorrectly, or may leave certain items blank. Response bias is also possible if graduates with specific characteristics are more (or less) likely to respond to the survey. For example, alumni who obtained jobs after completing their educational programs may have been more likely to respond to the survey than those who were unemployed, thus possibly biasing the survey results.

Whenever possible, data from other sources are presented in order to provide a context for the survey results and to compare the survey respondents with the overall population of American Indians on tribal lands. Two types of data are presented: 1) data on the demographic and enrollment characteristics of Tribal College graduates (or students), in order to consider whether the survey sample is representative of Tribal College graduates as a whole; and 2) data on unemployment rates, educational attainment, and earnings in the communities served by Tribal Colleges or for American Indians overall, in order to provide perspective for the current activities of Tribal College graduates.

In most cases, data that are truly comparable with the survey results were not available, largely due to the lack of differentiation of data according to Indian reservations, the low sample size for American Indians in national datasets, and the lack of recent data on degree completions, especially for Tribal Colleges. Nevertheless, some context is essential to understanding the survey results. Therefore, the best and most recent data available are provided in each case. For demographic and enrollment characteristics, data from a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) survey of degrees awarded in 1997-98,[8] an NCES survey of 1996-97 degrees and certificates awarded,[9] or a 1995 survey of Tribal College students is used. For employment and educational attainment, data are derived from the U.S. Census Bureau,[10] the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other sources.

Although a detailed, statistical analysis of differences between the survey results and national data has not been performed, the comparisons suggest that some characteristics of the Alumni Survey respondents differed slightly from those reported in national data. These differences may have resulted from actual changes over time, the fact that n... all of the Tribal Colleges participated in the survey, or potential response bias. Nevertheless, the survey results are broadly representative of all Tribal College graduates, and provide the most detailed and up-to-date information currently available on their activities.

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4 Some surveys were sent to spring 1997 graduates from Salish Kootenai College. Due to the anonymity of the survey responses, it is difficult to know how many of these graduates are included in the responses.

5 Ten of the respondents failed to report the college they attended, and two reported that they graduated from mainstream institutions. It is likely that the latter began their educational programs at Tribal Colleges, but transferred to mainstream colleges to complete their degree programs.

6 Fifty-four surveys that were returned as undeliverable were excluded in calculating the response rate.

7 Many studies have examined the obstacles to high response rates in mail surveys and the potential methods of boosting response rates. See, for example, the reviews of various mail survey analyses in Boser and Green, 1997, and Green and Hutchinson, 1996.

8 Only the total number of certificates, associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees, and master's degrees awarded was available for 1997-98. Data were not available from this source for D-Q University, the Institute of American Indian Arts, Little Priest Tribal College, and White Earth Tribal and Community College.

9 1996-97 is the most recent year for which full completions data are available, broken down by gender and race/ethnicity. College of the Menominee Nation, Little Priest Tribal College, and White Earth Tribal and Community College were missing data in that year. It should be noted that these data refer to degrees awarded, not degree recipients. Information is provided on double majors in the survey, but only for associate's degrees and higher.

10 The most recent data for the American Indian population, especially by reservation, are from the 1990 census. The *Current Population Survey*, conducted monthly by the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, is not sufficiently large to provide reliable estimates for American Indians.

"My college experience is one of the most positive, memorable times in my life. The staff and faculty were very encouraging and supportive of the efforts put forth by the students."

— graduate, Sitting Bull College

Classroom scene at Bay Mills Community College in Brimley, Michigan.

of Tribal College graduates in the spring of 1999 that was administered by the Sallie Mae Education Institute. This report—part of a series sponsored by the Tribal College Research and Database Initiative, a collaborative effort between AIHEC and the American Indian College Fund—presents the survey results. After a brief description of the methodology, the demographics and enrollment characteristics of the respondents are provided and compared to similar data regarding Tribal College students from secondary sources. Next, the report presents the current activities of Tribal College graduates, including employment patterns, median salaries, and the percentage of students who continue their education at tribal and mainstream institutions. In addition, the study describes graduates' satisfaction with various aspects of their Tribal College experiences. The report concludes with a summary of the many successes of Tribal College graduates, and points out areas in which the colleges need additional resources in order to improve the services they provide to students.

II. SURVEY FINDINGS

Characteristics of Tribal College Graduates

Demographics and Family Background

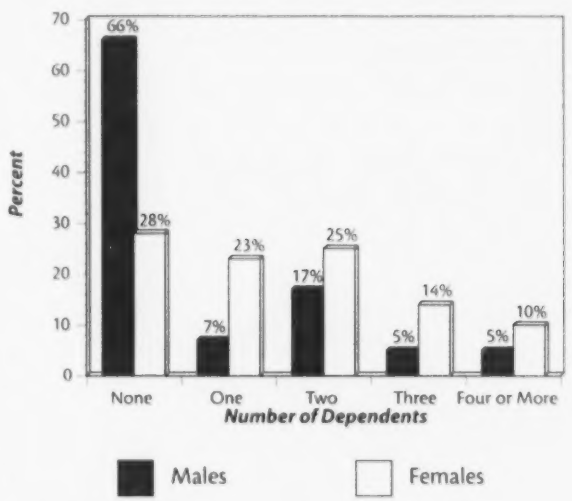
Table Two shows the demographic characteristics of the Tribal College alumni who responded to the survey. Nearly three-quarters of the responding Tribal College graduates were female. In general, Tribal Colleges appear to serve a disproportionate number of women, as is true for most community colleges. In 1995-96, about 63 percent of all community college graduates were female (NCES, 1996c) and in 1996-97, 68 percent of all Tribal College degrees were awarded to women (NCES, 1997).

"Bay Mills Community College provided me with an excellent opportunity to advance my education with one-on-one instruction. I had been out of school 37 years when I came to BMCC."
— graduate, Bay Mills Community College

Like the students served by most community colleges, many Tribal College graduates were older, "non-traditional" students. However, the Alumni Survey respondents were relatively older than the graduates of all two-year public colleges. About 74 percent of the Alumni Survey respondents were between the ages of 25 and 49, and the median age was 34. Nationally, the median age of students who graduated from community colleges in 1995-96 was 27, and 56 percent of these graduates were between the ages of 25 and 49 (NCES, 1996c). The survey respondents also appear to be slightly older than enrolled Tribal College students. A 1995 survey of students enrolled at Tribal Colleges (Boyer, 1995) showed that the median age of these students was 27.

Boyer's survey (1995) also showed that nearly 71 percent of the students were unmarried, and 62 percent had at least one dependent child. In comparison, about 55 percent of the respondents to the Tribal College Alumni Survey were unmarried (single, divorced, or separated), and 69 percent had at least one dependent child under the age of 18.[1]

Figure One: Unmarried Graduates of Tribal Colleges, by Gender and Number of Dependent Children Under the Age of 18



NOTE: Details may not ad to totals due to rounding.
Source: 1999 Tribal College Alumni Survey

[1] These percentages also seem to reflect the situation for residents of all American Indian reservation and trust land: in 1990, married couple families made up 46 percent of all households and families with children made up 54 percent (Census Bureau, 1992).

Table Two: Demographic Characteristics of the Tribal College Graduates

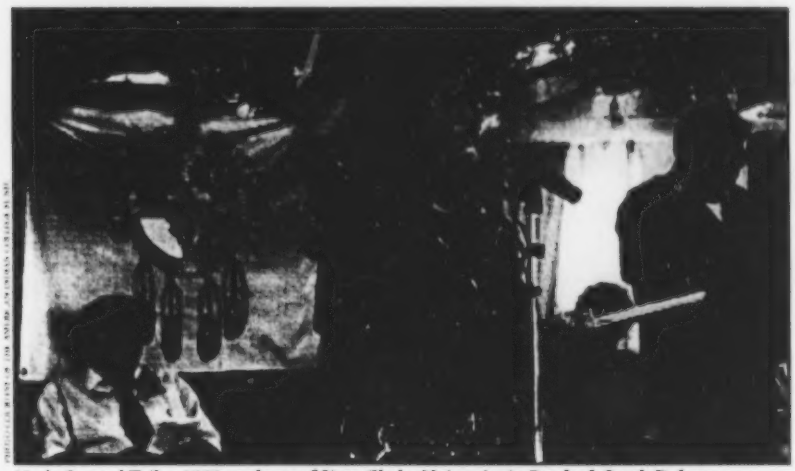
(N=242)

	Percent of total respondents	*Valid percentage*
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaskan Native	63%	64%
White	23%	23%
American Indian & White	10%	10%
Other	3%	3%
Missing	0%	--
TOTAL	100%	100%
Gender		
Male	26%	26%
Female	74%	74%
Missing	0%	--
TOTAL	100%	100%
Age		
Younger than 25	17%	17%
25 to 34	36%	37%
35 to 49	37%	37%
50 and older	9%	9%
Missing	1%	--
TOTAL	100%	100%
Marital Status		
Married	44%	45%
Unmarried	55%	55%
Missing	1%	--
TOTAL	100%	100%
Number of Dependent Children Under 18 Years Old		
None	31%	31%
1 to 2	43%	43%
3 to 4	20%	20%
5 or more	6%	6%
Missing	0%	--
TOTAL	100%	100%
Distance from Permanent Home to Tribal College		
5 miles or less	23%	23%
6 to 10 miles	20%	21%
11 to 50 miles	32%	32%
51 to 100 miles	9%	9%
101 to 250 miles	6%	6%
251 or more miles	9%	9%
Missing	1%	--
TOTAL	100%	100%

	Percent of total respondents	*Valid percentage*
Mother's Highest Level of Educational Achievement		
Grade school or less	10%	11%
Some high school	17%	18%
High school graduate/ GED recipient	25%	27%
Business or trade school	5%	5%
Some college	14%	15%
Two-year college degree	10%	10%
Four-year college degree	7%	7%
Some graduate or professional study	1%	1%
Graduate or professional degree	4%	4%
Don't know/missing	8%	--
TOTAL	100%	100%
Father's Highest Level of Educational Achievement		
Grade school or less	16%	18%
Some high school	15%	17%
High school graduate/ GED recipient	24%	28%
Business or trade school	9%	11%
Some college	12%	13%
Two-year college degree	4%	4%
Four-year college degree	5%	6%
Some graduate or professional study	1%	1%
Graduate or professional degree	0%	0%
Don't know/missing	14%	--
TOTAL	100%	100%

NOTE: Details may not add to totals due to rounding. Valid percentages exclude missing responses.

SOURCE: 1999 Tribal College Alumni Survey



Neola Spotted Tail, a 1998 graduate of Sinte Gleska University in Rosebud, South Dakota.

About half of the female graduates were unmarried, compared with 66 percent of the males; the unmarried female graduates were much more likely to have at least one dependent child. Figure One shows that 72 percent of the unmarried female graduates had at least one child, compared with 34 percent of the unmarried males. These figures suggest that the Tribal Colleges help many single mothers earn postsecondary degrees despite the demands of caring for young children.

> *"... Because of my job and family, part-time [attendance was] the only alternative in order to achieve my educational goals.*
>
> — graduate, Cankdeska Cikana Community College

Most of the Tribal College graduates, more than 44 percent, were first-generation college students—that is, neither of their parents had achieved an education level higher than a high school diploma. Of the survey respondents who knew their parents' education levels, 57 percent said their mothers' highest level of education was high school or less, while only 13 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher. The figures for fathers are 63 percent and 8 percent, respectively.

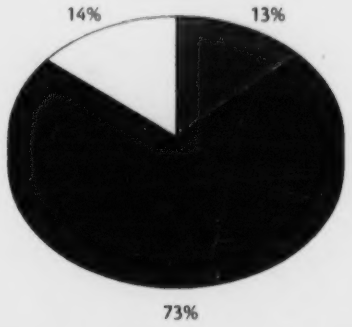
The majority of the Tribal College graduates, 64 percent, identified themselves as American Indian exclusively, while 10 percent identified themselves as American Indian and white (for a total of 74 percent). In its 1996-97 survey of degree completions, NCES found similar results: 64 percent of all Tribal College degrees and certificates were awarded to American Indians (NCES, 1997).[12] Nearly a quarter of the survey respondents were white. Many white or other non-Indian students attend Tribal Colleges because of their proximity—given the geographic isolation of many reservation communities—and their affordability.[13] However, this varies by institution, with many Tribal Colleges enrolling almost all American Indian students.

Finally, most of the survey respondents noted that the Tribal College they attended was located near their home communities. For more than three-quarters of the survey respondents, the distance from their permanent homes to the Tribal Colleges was 50 miles or less. This is consistent with the 1995 survey of enrolled students (Boyer, 1995), which found that for almost 85 percent of the students the Tribal College was 50 miles or less from their permanent homes. These substantial majorities reflect the fact that Tribal Colleges, like most community colleges, primarily serve their local communities, although some draw from a more national base of American Indian students. In addition, they demonstrate that Tribal College graduates are likely to remain in local communities after earning degrees.

[12] Unlike the Tribal College Alumni Survey, the NCES survey did not allow respondents of mixed ancestry to report more than one racial identification category.

[13] In 1990, non-Indian residents made up 35 percent of the total population on Tribal College reservations on average, and 45 percent of the local communities of all Tribal Colleges, including the cities in which non-reservation-based Tribal Colleges are located. These figures were calculated as the average of community averages (Census Bureau, 1999). Overall, a significant proportion of residents of American Indian reservation and trust land are non-Indian; in 1990, 54 percent of all persons living on reservations and trust land were American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut (Census Bureau, 1998). These non-Indian reservation residents may face some of the same barriers to postsecondary education as American Indian residents.

Figure Two: Degrees Earned by Tribal College Graduates in 1998



NOTE: Percentages exclude graduates who did not respond to the question.
Source: 1999 Tribal College Alumni Survey

Table Three: Graduates' Major Fields of Study at the Tribal College They Attended

Business/Accounting	19%
Computer/Office Technology	13%
Nursing/Health Care	13%
Psychology/Social Work/Human Services	11%
Teaching/Education	11%
General Studies	6%
Native American Studies	5%
Clerk/Secretary/Office Admin.	5%
Other	17%
TOTAL	100%

NOTE: Excludes graduates who did not respond to the question. Details may not add to total due to rounding.
Source: 1999 Tribal College Alumni Survey

Degrees and Fields of Study

Most of the Tribal Colleges are two-year colleges that primarily award associate's degrees and certificates. In 1997-98, 65 percent of all degrees and certificates awarded by Tribal Colleges were associate's degrees, 30 percent were certificates or other awards below the bachelor's degree level, and only 5 percent were bachelor's degrees or higher (NCES, 1999). Similarly, most of the Tribal College graduates who responded to the survey received associate's degrees. Figure Two shows that 73 percent of the graduates in 1998 earned associate's degrees from their institutions, 13 percent received certificates, and 14 percent were awarded bachelor's degrees.

"I worked very hard at getting my associate's degree at Haskell University for over four years. This molded me into a very disciplined student who worked during the day and studied at night."
— graduate, Haskell Indian Nations University

The respondents received their certificates and degrees in a wide variety of fields of study. As Table Three indicates, most of the graduates majored in the fields of business and accounting (19 percent), nursing and health care (13 percent), computer and office technology (13 percent), education/teaching (11 percent), and psychology/social work/human services (11 percent). This reflects a pattern similar to the survey of enrolled Tribal College students, which revealed the most common majors to be business, health professions, education, and vocational/technical trades (Boyer, 1995).

Current Activities of Tribal College Graduates

Approximately one year after receiving their degrees or certificates, the overwhelming majority of Tribal College graduates, 91 percent, were either working or attending college (see Table Four and Figure Three). More than half, 52 percent, were working only; an additional 22 percent were both working and attending college, 17 percent were attending college only, and just 9 percent were neither working nor attending school. Because the survey allowed graduates to check more than one response, the results provide a detailed look at the combination of current activities of Tribal College alumni.

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Table Four: Current Activities of Tribal College Graduates

Multiple response (respondents may have chosen more than one activity):	Percentage of respondents
Working full-time outside the home	54%
Working part-time outside the home	19%
Self employed	3%
Working as homemaker, not employed outside the home	7%
Attending college for associate's degree or certificate	6%
Attending college for bachelor's degree	32%
Attending college for graduate or professional degree	3%
Seeking full-time job	14%
Seeking part-time job	6%

Combined categories (respondents can be in only one category): *	Percentage of respondents
Working (including self employed), not attending college	52%
Attending college, not working	17%
Working and attending college	22%
Neither working nor attending college	9%
TOTAL	100%

* Based on responses regarding work and enrollment status. The majority of homemakers were included in the "neither working nor attending college" category.
NOTE: Percentages exclude graduates who selected none of the activities.
Source: 1999 Tribal College Alumni Survey

"My mother . . . graduated in 1993, my niece and I graduated in 1998, two of my sisters will graduate in 1999 and another will graduate in 2000. In addition, three other sisters, my brother and nephew have all attended the Tribal College. If not for the Tribal College, probably only my niece would ever have graduated."
— graduate, Blackfeet Community College

Overall, 74 percent of the graduates said they were employed—54 percent were employed full-time, 19 percent were working part-time, and 3 percent were self-employed.[14] (Interestingly, 17 percent of these working Tribal College graduates said college faculty had helped them obtain their current jobs.) About 7 percent of the survey respondents were homemakers who were not employed outside the home. Only 20 percent were seeking full-time or part-time jobs, and just 8 percent were seeking jobs and also were not attending school.

This is in stark contrast to the general employment patterns of American Indians living on reservations. In 1997, the unemployment rate of American Indian residents of Tribal College reservations was 55 percent, on average, and was 50 percent for all American Indians living on reservations (BIA, 1999).[15] Average unemployment rates are lower when all residents of all Tribal College communities are considered; in 1990, for example, the unemployment rate for Tribal College reservations and cities averaged 18 percent (Census Bureau, 1999). Nevertheless, unemployment rates are clearly high for most of the communities served by Tribal Colleges. It is therefore encouraging that the majority of Tribal College graduates reported being employed.[16]

Furthermore, 39 percent of the responding alumni said they were attending college at the time of the survey, with 32 percent going on to seek a bachelor's degree. Nationally, about 35 percent of the graduates from community colleges

[14] Details do not sum to the total due to multiple responses.

[15] Note that the Bureau of Labor Statistics/Census Bureau definition of unemployment—in the labor force and seeking work—differs slightly from the Alumni Survey questions. Also, the 55 percent unemployment figure for Tribal College reservations does not include D-Q University, Haskell Indian Nations University, the Institute of American Indian Arts, Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, and United Tribes Technical College because they are not located on reservation or trust land, and does not include Crownpoint Institute of Technology because doing so would duplicate the information for Diné College. The figure is an average of the individual reservation averages, calculating across the whole group would produce an average of 62 percent.

[16] It is difficult to determine the direct effects of Tribal Colleges on graduates' employment. Such an assessment is complicated by the fact that graduates may have had their jobs before or during the time they were enrolled and that employed graduates may have been more likely to respond to the survey than those who had not found jobs.

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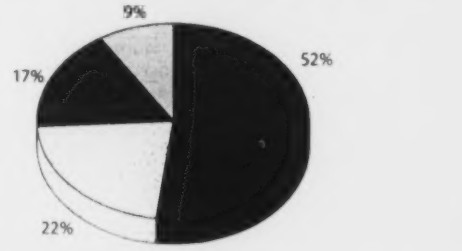
Figure Three: Current Employment and College Enrollment Activities of Tribal College Graduates



NOTE: Based on responses regarding work and enrollment status. Working includes self-employment. The majority of homemakers are included in the "neither working nor attending college" category. Percentages exclude graduates who selected none of the possible activities.
Source: 1999 Tribal College Alumni Survey

who received associate's degrees in 1992-93 remained enrolled in higher education during the 1993-94 academic year (NCES, 1994). As mentioned, many of the Tribal College graduates who were employed also were still enrolled in higher education (22 percent). This may have occurred because some of their occupational fields—particularly teaching and nursing—require higher degrees as a prerequisite for licensure and advancement.

"I gained experience from taking classes at CIT for administrative assistance, which is how I got my temporary employment. I plan on going back to school to achieve my AAS degree."
— graduate, Crownpoint Institute of Technology

It is encouraging that many of the Tribal College graduates were continuing to seek higher education, because educational attainment rates among American Indians in general are low. A disproportionately low number of American Indians earn bachelor's and advanced degrees in particular. In 1995, less than 1 percent each of bachelor's, master's, and first-professional degrees conferred were awarded to American Indians; only 148 doctoral degrees were awarded to American Indians, far less than 1 percent of the total (Wilds and Wilson, 1998).[17]

"One of the most valuable experiences I had at NWIC was being among the group of students who were involved with the start-up of the school snack shop... It was a valuable experience for me, given that my major was in business and I would like to run my own business."
— graduate, Northwest Indian College

Employment Patterns of Tribal College Graduates

Many of the 1998 Tribal College graduates who had jobs outside of their homes were employed in fields that are "high need" occupational areas on American Indian reservations. Among the survey respondents who were employed, 13 percent were teaching in elementary or secondary schools, and 16 percent were nurses or in other health care occupations (see Figure Four). Currently, there are shortages of American Indian teachers and nurses in many reservation communities. Overall access to health care remains a concern on virtually every reservation, as does disproportionately low numbers of American Indian doctors and nurses (Boyer, 1997). In addition, after years of under-representation in Bureau of Indian Affairs schools and other elementary and secondary schools with high proportions of American Indian students, American Indian teachers are being sought as role models in reservation communities (Pavel, Curtin, and Whitener, 1997; Noley, 1992). The Tribal Colleges appear to be

[17] About 0.6 percent of the bachelor's, 0.4 percent of master's, 0.5 percent of first-professional, and 0.4 percent of doctoral degrees were awarded to American Indians in that year. In comparison, in 1995 American Indians made up 0.9 percent of the total resident population (Census Bureau, 1998). Although these percentages are too small to make a definitive statement, anecdotal evidence suggests that American Indians are in fact underrepresented in these degrees. In addition, the low educational attainment figures support this assertion.

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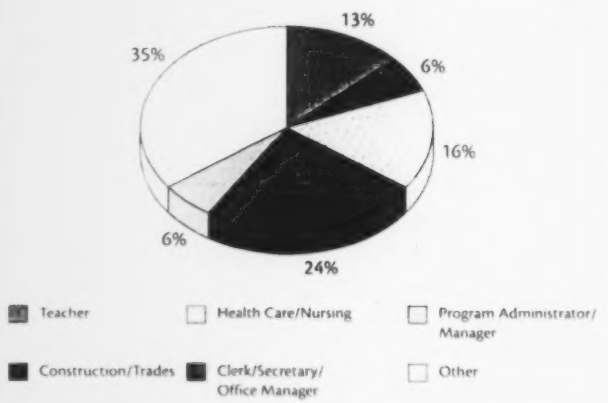
Veterinarian technology students at Crownpoint Institute of Technology in Crownpoint, New Mexico, Spring 1998.

Figure Four: Occupational Fields for Currently Employed Tribal College Graduates



NOTE: Includes only those graduates who reported working full-time or part-time or were self-employed, and who responded to the question. Details may not add to total due to rounding.
Source: 1999 Tribal College Alumni Survey

addressing these shortages by producing a number of graduates who obtain jobs in these areas.

The plurality of working graduates, 24 percent, held jobs as clerks, secretaries, or office managers. In addition, 6 percent were in construction or other trades; 6 percent were program administrators or managers; and 35 percent held jobs in a wide variety of other occupations, including day care providers, law enforcement personnel, and computer technicians. A substantial portion of the jobs obtained by the Tribal College alumni require specific training or certification, reflecting the fact that the missions of many of the Tribal Colleges—like those of many community colleges—emphasize vocational education, in an attempt to meet the specific needs of local communities.

"My most valuable experience while going to Turtle Mountain Community College was on-the-job training. I was working in the Student Services office under work-study. I did very well working through college. It gave me the free time I needed to get through college and help take care of my family."

— graduate, Turtle Mountain Community College

In general, the working graduates reported a relationship between the skills needed for their current jobs and major fields of study while attending the Tribal Colleges. Of those who responded, 49 percent said the skills and training they use for their jobs were directly related to their college majors, and an additional 32 percent said they were somewhat related. Moreover, 86 percent of working alumni whose current job skills were related to their majors said Tribal College programs were "good" or "excellent" preparation for their jobs.

Annual Salaries of Tribal College Graduates

The median salary for all currently employed Tribal College graduates was $15,683, with nearly 20 percent reporting annual salaries of $25,000 or higher (see Table Five). The median salary of the respondents who were working full time was $18,444. About 26 percent of these full-time employees had salaries of $25,000 or more. Although comparable data on individual earnings for Tribal College communities are not available, overall income levels are

Table Five: Current Annual Salaries of Tribal College Graduates

Salary Level for All	*Percentage of Total*
Under $6,000	19%
$6,000 to $9,999	13%
$10,000 to $14,999	16%
$15,000 to $19,999	21%
$20,000 to $24,999	12%
$25,000 to $29,999	9%
$30,000 to $39,999	9%
$40,000 to $49,999	1%
$50,000 and over	1%
TOTAL	100%
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	161
MEDIAN SALARY	$15,683

Salary Level for Full-Time Employees	*Percentage of Total*
Under $6,000	8%
$6,000 to $9,999	9%
$10,000 to $14,999	16%
$15,000 to $19,999	25%
$20,000 to $24,999	16%
$25,000 to $29,999	12%
$30,000 to $39,999	13%
$40,000 to $49,999	1%
$50,000 and over	1%
TOTAL	100%
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	126
MEDIAN SALARY	$18,444

NOTE: Details may not add to totals due to rounding. Salary level for all is for those graduates who reported working full-time or part-time or being self-employed, and who responded to the question. Full-time employees are respondents who reported averaging 35 hours or more per week in their current jobs, including self-employment, and who responded to the question.
Source: 1999 Tribal College Alumni Survey

clearly low in these areas, especially in the reservation communities. At the time of the 1990 census, median household income levels on reservations on which Tribal Colleges are located, on average, were about half of the median household income level for the U.S. population as a whole (Census Bureau, 1999).[18]

As would be expected, the median annual salaries of survey respondents increased with the level of education. The median salary for currently employed graduates who had earned bachelor's degrees was $20,020, compared to $15,115 for those who earned associate's degrees and $12,500 for those who earned certificates.

Although sample sizes are small in each category, it appears that salary levels also varied by occupation. For example, median salaries for teachers ($15,655) were higher than those reported by respondents with jobs in the nursing/health care field ($11,205). This difference can be explained in part because graduates in certain occupations were more likely to have received a bachelor's degree. Thus, about 38 percent of the graduates with teaching jobs had earned bachelor's degrees from Tribal Colleges, compared with just 14 percent of those in nursing/health care.

"The College of the Menominee Nation has a 2+2 program... Without this program and this Tribal College, I would never have tried college again. I'm doing well at [the University of Wisconsin at Green Bay] and I owe a lot to CMN for getting me started."

— graduate, College of the Menominee Nation

Alumni Who Continued Their Postsecondary Education in 1998-99

About 48 percent of Tribal College graduates sought further education at higher education institutions at some point during the 1998-99 academic year,[19] and 82 percent of survey respondents plan to complete a bachelor's degree or higher at some point. These figures emphasize the transfer function of Tribal Colleges. Most of the two-year Tribal Colleges have

[18] 1990 census data are the most recent available for American Indians living on reservation and trust land. The household income figure excludes five Tribal Colleges that are not located on reservations. The Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics produce regular estimates of salary averages through the *Current Population Survey*, but the data are not available by Indian reservation and the sample size for American Indians is too small to produce reliable estimates for American Indians overall.

[19] There is some discrepancy in the survey data between those who reported their current activity as attending college early in the survey, 39 percent, and those who answered the follow-up questions on college attended in 1998-99 (48 percent), field of study (48 percent), attendance status (48 percent), and preparation (46 percent). Some of the discrepancy is likely due to the time period, i.e., attendance at the time of the survey versus attendance at any time during the 1998-99 academic year. Part of the difference also may be due to a misunderstanding of the earlier question, in which graduates may be taking classes but do not consider themselves to be "attending college." Unless noted otherwise, the figures reported in this section are for those who answered each relevant question, not those who reported attending college as a current activity.

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articulation agreements with four-year colleges and universities in their states to facilitate the transfer of coursework, or work closely with mainstream colleges to have faculty teach the remaining courses on the Tribal College campuses (AIHEC and The Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999; Boyer, 1997).

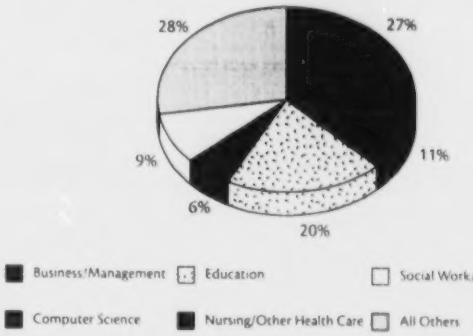
"The practical nursing program at United Tribes Technical College is an excellent course. It prepared me very well for employment as a practical nurse, as well as furthering my education in nursing."

— graduate, United Tribes Technical College

Among the respondents who were attending college at the time of the survey, 82 percent were pursuing bachelor's degrees, 14 percent were enrolled in associate's degree or certificate programs, and 7 percent were enrolled in graduate or professional schools.[20] About 80 percent of graduates who continued their education at any time during 1998-99 were enrolled full time, and 54 percent were enrolled at a Tribal College.

The fields of study these continuing students pursued varied widely. Figure Five shows that 27 percent of the continuing students were majoring in business/management, 20 percent in education, 11 percent in computer science, 9 percent in social work or human services, 6 percent in nursing or other health care fields, and 28 percent in a variety of other fields.[21] More than a quarter of the continuing students were majoring in business and accounting—a positive sign for the future, since one of the goals of Tribal Colleges is to encourage small business and entrepreneurial activities to help create jobs on the reservations (AIHEC and The Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2000).

Figure Five: College Majors for Tribal College Graduates Continuing Their Education in 1998–1999



NOTE: Includes only those graduates who reported they were enrolled in college sometime during the 1998-99 academic year, and who responded to the question. Details may not add to total due to rounding.
Source: 1999 Tribal College Alumni Survey

Table Six: Tribal College Graduates' Ratings of the Adequacy of Their Education for Advanced Study

Rating	*Percentage of Respondents*
It was excellent preparation	31%
It was good preparation	44%
It was adequate preparation	18%
It was not adequate preparation	3%
It did not apply at all to my further studies	5%
TOTAL	100%

NOTE: Percentages are for only those graduates who reported attending college sometime during the 1998-99 academic year and who responded to the question. Details may not add to total due to rounding.
Source: 1999 Tribal College Alumni Survey

Many of the graduates who were enrolled in 1998-99 believed their Tribal College education greatly helped them to pursue these higher degrees. Almost 75 percent of the survey respondents who continued their education thought that the Tribal College programs provided "excellent preparation" or "good preparation" for their advanced studies (see Table Six). Only 3 percent of these students said their Tribal College education was "inadequate" for future study, and 5 percent said their education was not applicable to future study.

[20] These figures add to more than 100 percent due to multiple responses.
[21] Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding.

"My most valuable experience was with the teaching and administrative staff . . . I felt at ease because there was always someone there for you no matter what the situation."

— graduate, Stone Child College

Satisfaction with Tribal College Education

Due in part to relatively high rates of employment, college continuation rates, and preparation for continuing higher education, the overwhelming majority of the Tribal College graduates appear to have had very positive educational experiences. As Figure Six shows, 88 percent of these graduates said they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" withtheir overall college experiences. The graduates were most satisfied with their major courses (91 percent satisfied or very satisfied), followed by class sizes (88 percent), overall instruction (87 percent), and contact with faculty and administrators (79 percent). These findings are consistent with those of the 1995 survey of enrolled students, which found that faculty and staff, the traditional cultural emphasis, the individualized attention, and the size of classes were among the greatest strengths of the colleges (Boyer, 1995).

"The most valuable experience was the curriculum. I enjoyed each instructor for his knowledge of not only the study at hand, but his awareness of the culture. The instructors integrated the emphasis on Native American culture with teaching about other cultures."

— graduate, Salish Kootenai College

The high ratings may be due partially to the relatively low enrollment numbers at most Tribal Colleges; on average, Tribal Colleges enrolled only 600 students in the fall of 1996 (NCES, 1996b). Small class sizes give the students opportunities to have close contact with faculty, to gain a great deal from classroom instruction, and to integrate traditional values into the curricula and institutional environments. Such personal attention is invaluable to the success of Tribal College students (Tierney, 1992; Boyer, 1997).

PHOTO BY LEE MARMON, COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN COLLEGE FUND.

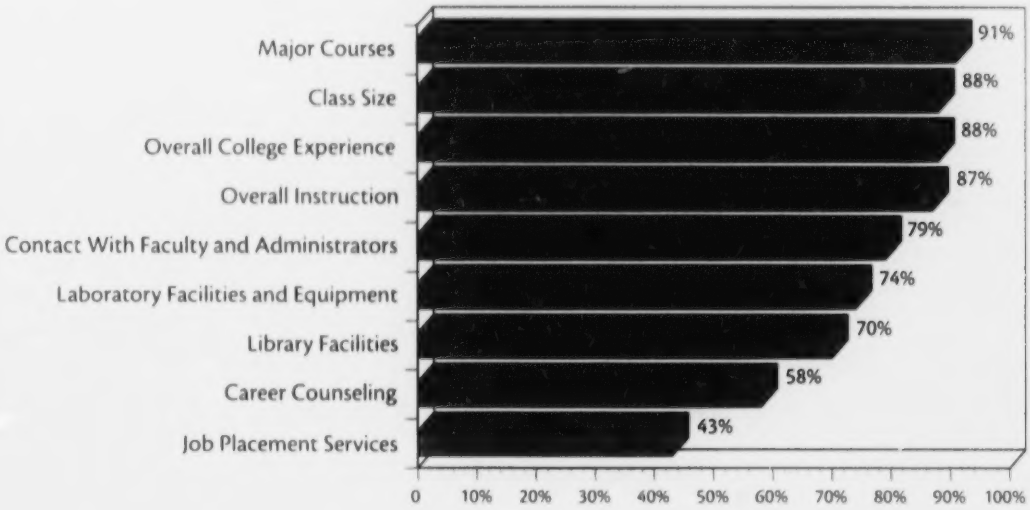
Printmaking instructor Melanie Yazzie and one of her students at Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Spring 1998.

However, the graduates had lower ratings for the campus laboratory facilities, (74 percent), library facilities (70 percent), career counseling (58 percent), and job placement services (43 percent). Boyer (1995) found that many students at Tribal Colleges rated the physical infrastructure such as classrooms, equipment, laboratories, and library facilities among the greatest needs of the colleges. Most Tribal Colleges have few financial resources, and cannot provide adequate, up-to-date library and laboratory facilities for their students. In fact, at most of the colleges classroom and office space is severely restricted, leaving little room for student lounges and other facilities that students at many other colleges take for granted (Boyer, 1997).

Attending a tribal college gave me the courage to go back to school. The small classes and personal relationship with the teachers and professors made me want to give school a chance again. I will never forget the two years that I spent at Fort Peck Community College."

— graduate, Fort Peck Community College

Figure Six: Percentage of Tribal College Graduates Who Were "Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied" with Different Aspects of Their Tribal College Experience



NOTE: Includes only those graduates who responded to the question.
Source: 1999 Tribal College Alumni Survey

The graduates' low ratings for career counseling and job assistance services also may reflect the scarcity of jobs on and near reservations, rather than the lack of job placement services at the institutions. Many of the colleges are located on geographically isolated reservations where jobs are generally hard to find, even for residents with college degrees. Nonetheless, many of the colleges do not have career placement services, presumably due to a lack of available resources given more pressing needs (AIHEC, 1999).

"I really enjoyed attending college at SWCC. I think they have an excellent staff . . ."

— graduate, Sisseton Wahpeton Community College

III. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In general, both the results of the Tribal College Alumni Survey and national data show that Tribal College graduates tend to be non-traditional, female, American Indian, first-generation recipients of associate's degrees and certificates who remain in the local community. These results are broadly representative of all Tribal College graduates and provide the most detailed information on their activities currently available.

The findings strongly suggest that the education students receive has had a positive effect on their lives. Although further research is necessary to determine cause and effect, Tribal College graduates seem to be employed at higher rates than might have been expected had they not achieved their degrees or certificates. The majority of the graduates reported having full- or part-time jobs, despite the difficult circumstances that exist in most reservation communities. Many Tribal College graduates were able to obtain jobs that serve their local communities, thereby positively affecting both the students and the overall American Indian population. In addition, the majority of Tribal College graduates said their jobs were related to their college majors, and felt that the coursework taken through those majors was good preparation for their jobs.

"During my years attending a Tribal College, I received a lot more attention and help than I would have if I'd attended a university. I feel that the Tribal College has given me the experience and ability to be a successful student."

— graduate, Dull Knife Memorial College

George McDonald, a 1999 graduate of United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, North Dakota.

The educational programs at Tribal Colleges also have encouraged many graduates to continue to seek higher education, especially bachelor's degrees. A substantial share of the alumni said they were able to use their Tribal College experiences and credentials to transfer to mainstream institutions. Therefore, the colleges appear to have been successful in their transfer function, contributing to increasing levels of educational attainment for the American Indian communities they serve.

The colleges may have been able to achieve these successes because of their small class sizes and the ability of faculty and administrators to work closely with students. The overwhelming majority of

Tribal College graduates were satisfied with their overall college experience, with their major courses, class sizes, overall instruction, and contact with faculty and administrators. Many of the graduates also said that their Tribal College coursework prepared them for future work or advanced study. Although the Alumni Survey did not specifically address the issue, it is possible that the culturally supportive environment of the Tribal Colleges has contributed toward these high satisfaction levels, in contrast with many American Indian students' failure to become integrated into mainstream college communities in the past.

"My most valuable experience was the joy and excitement I felt when I was marching down the aisle and to the stage to get my diploma . . ."

— graduate, Si Tanka College

However, the Tribal College graduates were less satisfied with laboratory and library facilities on the campuses, and few students believed they received adequate career counseling and job placement services. These evaluations point to the Tribal Colleges' need for additional resources. The colleges' need for facilities and other basic infrastructure is so extensive that meeting this need is an educational necessity; yet most of the colleges must put available funds into instruction-related expenses instead (The Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2000). While the colleges appear to have made efficient use of limited funding to provide basic services and supportive instruction, they now require additional resources and facilities to provide added training in high technology and other areas considered necessary for today's higher education students.

Overall, the findings of the Alumni Survey have positive implications for Tribal Colleges, their students, and the communities they serve. Given the graduates' tendency to remain nearby, the employment and continuing education patterns of Tribal College alumni are hopeful signs for struggling communities. As students continue to graduate and feel satisfied with the educational experiences and preparation provided by the Tribal Colleges, communities can strengthen their reliance on these unique institutions—and the role models they help shape—to promote social and economic change. Additional surveys of future Tribal College graduates can build upon these results to help show the colleges' success over time.

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